Hair Length for men and women – What does the Scriptures tell us
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In every culture and country we see men and women with different hair lengths. In the Middle East, women commonly have long hair and men have short hair. In countries like Sweden, we see men having long hair and women having short hair. Some people and churches have used hair length as a major issue in developing an opinion when they see a person. For some religious organisations, it does not matter what the person believes in, if he is a man and has long hair, we cannot fellowship with him. Similarly, if they are a woman and do not have long hair we cannot fellowship with her.

The aim of this document is to shed light on what the Scriptures say about hair length in both men and women. This article aims to answer the following key questions:

1. How many times does the word hair/hairs appear in the Scriptures?
2. What types of hair lengths do we see in the Tanakh (Old Testament) and in the Messianic Writings (New Testament)?
3. How do we define long hair and short hair biblically?
4. What is the hair length required for men and women as per the Scriptures?
5. Did Yehoshua HaMashiach (Jesus Christ) have long or short hair?

How many times do the word hair/hairs appear in the Scriptures?

We need to first examine how many times the word “hair” and “hairs” appear in the Tanakh and in the Messianic Writings. The word “hair” is mentioned 64 times. The word “hairs” is mentioned 15 times. Some of the references in relation to the word hair also refer to animal hair.

We will now see the verses that particularly refer to “hair length” from the Scriptures in its chronological order.

Numbers 6:5 – “All the days of the vow (Nazirite) of his separation a razor does not come upon his head. Until the days are completed for which he does separate himself to YHWH, he is set apart. He shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long”.

2 Samuel 14:26 – “And when he cut the hair of his head, for it was at every year’s end that he cut it because it was heavy on him, when he cut it, he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred sheqels by the sovereign’s weight”.

Ezekiel 44:20 – “And their heads they shall not shave, nor shall they let their hair grow long, they shall keep their hair well-trimmed.”

John 11:2 – “Now it was Miryam who anointed the Master with perfume and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Elazar was sick”.

1 Corinthians 11:14-16 – “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man indeed has long hair, it is a disrespect to him? And if a woman has long hair, it is an esteem to her, because the long hair has been given to her over against a veil. If, however, anyone seems to be contentious (causing to have an argument), we do not have such a habit, nor do the assemblies of Elohim”.

What types of hair lengths do we see in the scriptures in the Tanakh (Old Testament) and in the Messianic Writings (New Testament)?

From the Tanakh and Messianic Writings we know that there are two types of hair length. The first one is long hair and the second one is trimmed hair. The Torah does not say anything about required hair length for males or females except that when a man takes a Nazirite vow he must not cut his hair at all (he should let his hair grow).

How do we define long hair and short hair biblically?

The million dollar question is how do we define long hair and short hair biblically? According to the Scriptures, Torah means “instruction in righteousness.” So if the Torah does not specify hair length for men and women, why are churches and synagogues making a big deal on hair length for a man and a woman?

For example, some churches make such a big issue with men having long hair that without cutting hair to their standard (according to the man-made law of the church), you cannot come
to the church. Similarly, if women don’t have long hair then they need to either wear a hat or have some sort of covering on their head.

So if God (Elohim) did not make a rule about hair length for men and women in the Torah, what is the problem with churches and other religious institutions? These churches want to add their own law under the banner of God, which itself is a direct violation of God’s command “You must not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it, so that you may keep the commands of the YHWH your Elohim I am giving you” (Deuteronomy 4:2).

Now we will see how people in Biblical times used to define words like “length/long.”

Understanding Length in Biblical times

In Biblical times the measures of length originated from the human body. In many cultures around the world, people still use fingers, hand, arm, and foot to define length. For example, people living in countries like India and Egypt still use hand/foot measurements to define length. These measures vary between every person based on their height, weight and physique.

In ancient Israel length was classified as following:

a) Finger-breadth – In Hebrew it is called “Etzba.” A fingerbreadth has the width of an adult human finger. For example, the phrase two fingers of whiskey refer to the amount of whiskey that would fill a glass to the level of two fingers wrapped around the glass at the bottom.

b) Palm – In Hebrew it is called “Tefah” or “Tefach.” A palm breadth is based on the breadth of a human hand without the thumb and fingers measured from the fist.

c) Span – In Hebrew it is called “Zeret.” A span is the distance measured from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger.

d) Ell – In Hebrew it is called “Amah.” An ell is the length of arm from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger.

e) Mile – In Hebrew it is called “Mil.” Mil is the distance walked in 18 minutes.

f) Parsa – In Hebrew it is called “Parasa.” Parasa is the distance walked in 72 minutes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Approximate Metric Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fingerbreadth (Etzba)</td>
<td>2 – 2.4 cms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm (Tefah)</td>
<td>8 – 9.6 cms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Span (Zeret)</td>
<td>24 – 28.8 cms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ell (Amah)</td>
<td>48 – 57.6 cms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mile (Mil)</td>
<td>960 – 1152 meters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsa (Parasa)</td>
<td>3.84 – 4.608 km</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the hair length required for men and women as per the scriptures?

In the Tanakh we see that if you have taken a Nazirite vow, you cannot cut your hair at all unless that vow has been fulfilled (Numbers 6:5). Similarly, if you are a priest you cannot have long hair and you must keep your hair well-trimmed for men (Ezekiel 44:20).

So what do we mean by “keep your hair well-trimmed?” On average, human hair on our head takes 30 days to grow in males. Most males have a haircut every 30 days or once a month. This is what we call “keeping the hair well-trimmed.”

For women we don’t see any Scriptures in the Tanakh that tells them to cut their hair. So technically, long hair is still classified as a matter of beauty in women.

In the Messianic writings, we come to 1 Corinthians 11:14-16. This verse has been a subject of intense controversy and is still used by many churches as their gold standard. Let’s now have a close examination of 1 Corinthians 11:14-16 and see what is actually being said.

Does not nature itself teach you that if a man indeed has long hair, it is disrespect to him? And if a woman has long hair, it is an esteem to her, because the long hair has been given to her over against a veil. If, however, anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a habit, nor do the assemblies of Elohim. (1 Corinthians 11:14-16)

The first thing that we need to understand is this: how can nature teach us that long hair on man is a disrespect? Every day I go to nature (trees and greenery behind my house) and ask the question: can you tell me, nature, if long hair on me is
disrespect? Until today I have not received any answer from nature. So what does this word nature actually mean? The word nature comes from the Greek word “phuis,” which means “natural” (Strong’s concordance number 5449). Let us look at some common examples:

- It is natural for women to give birth
- It is natural for women to have long hair
- It is natural for men to have a beard
- It is natural for man to get married to a woman
- It is natural for man and women to fall in love

Let us look at an example from the scriptures:

Because of this Elohim gave them over to degrading passions. For even their women exchanged natural relations for what is against nature, and likewise, the men also, having left natural relations with woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing indecency, and receiving back the reward which was due for their straying. (Romans 1: 26-27)

What we can understand is that the word “natural” or “nature” means something that is intended by Elohim to be as it is. In other words, “this is how nature intended it to be.” For instance, it is not natural or normal for men to have sex with men, or for women to have sex with women; these are an abomination to God. This is against the natural laws of Elohim.

The second thing we need to understand is: how can Apostle Paul create a new law (1 Corinthians 11:14-16) when such a law is not part of the Torah? Paul did not create any new law. He just spoke to the people in the assembly on the natural things that were intended by God. That is why the verse ends with “...anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a habit, nor do the assemblies of Elohim”. The last verse means, if you would like to argue about hair length, it is up to you as this has nothing to do with God’s people.

How do you measure the length of a man’s hair? Catch hold of your hair. Pull your hair either backwards or forwards with the palm of your hand and whatever hair that comes out from the palm of your hand cut it off with a scissors. This is how you measure your hair length using the palm of your hand.

For men who have wavy or curly hair, your hair could look shorter or thicker than others when using the palm measurement. For men who have straight hair, your hair could look longer than other men when using palm measurement.

Have you ever noticed the hair length of well-known men like Benjamin Franklin (founding father of the United States)? When we look at his photo, we might think that he has long hair. But, he never had long hair. His hair length was basically based on the palm of his hand (see Figure 2). People living in the 17th century knew how to measure their hair length, which was always based on the palm of their hand.
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Similarly, have you noted the hair length of George Washington and Albert Einstein? Again their hair length was based on the palm of their hand (See Figure 3 and Figure 4).

When we men used to go for a haircut in the 20th century, did you notice that the hairstylist (barber) used to use their fingers to measure hair length when cutting with scissors? Where do you think they got the idea to use their fingers to measure hair length? It was passed from one generation to another that when you measure hair, you use your palm or your fingers.

In summary, you can say that a man’s hair length is based on the palm of his hand. It is not based on meaningless, man-made traditions of churches or by your pastor/rabbi. It is based on the palm of your hand. What we can conclude about hair length from an Israelite traditional perspective is that a man’s hair length is based on the palm of his hand.

How do you measure the length of a woman’s hair? In ancient Biblical times, women used to not cut their hair. Hair length in women was always based on the length of her arm (see Figure 5). Why do you think women in Asia and in the Middle East have long hair (based on their arm length)? The reason being, it is passed from one generation to another that women must have long hair.

Why do women these days in Western countries have short hair? The reason being, they have embraced the lifestyle of prostitutes without even knowing that years ago people used to identity a prostitute (whore) by short hair. Even though these are harsh words directed to a woman, the truth cannot be hidden. Ask your great grandparents what did the word flapper mean? The word flapper means prostitute. Why did it mean prostitute? Because these women used to cut their hair short to identify themselves as prostitutes. That is why in 1920s if women had short hair they used to wear a beautiful hat, so that they would not be identified as prostitutes or as a flapper.

For instance the Encyclopaedia Wikipedia says, “flappers were a new breed of young Western women in the 1920s who wore short skirts, bobbed (shortened/cut) their hair, listened to jazz, and flaunted (display) their disdain (contempt) for what was then considered acceptable behavior. Flappers were seen as brash for wearing excessive makeup, drinking, treating sex in a casual manner, smoking, driving automobiles, and otherwise flouting (openly disregard) social and sexual norms.”

Have you noticed that, in the 20th century, all women prisoners in many countries had their hair shaved off or had very short hair.
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Hair? This was a punishment prescribed by law in many countries. Many pagan religions around the world practice short hair on women, like Buddhist monks and other religions. The question that women need to ask themselves is: do you want to be a part of this custom that originates from paganism?

We can see that over time, as a society, our norms have degraded. What is evil we say is good. What is good we say is evil. In the Israelite custom, when the hair of a woman was too long and was not manageable, they used to measure the hair using their arm length and excess hair was cut off. This is the same custom that is followed in many countries in Asia and in the Middle East.

It is natural for women to have long hair, as this is how you were created by YHWH. While today’s society teaches that short hair on women is the accepted standard, the Scriptures and the traditions of our forefathers and patriarchs teach us that long hair is the beauty of women.

Did Yehoshua HaMashiach (Jesus Christ) have long or short hair?

Yehoshua HaMashiach did not have long hair as he never took a Nazirite vow. His hair length was based on the palm of his hand which was the standard accepted in an Israelite society. Keep in mind that Yehoshua HaMashiach is our high priest (Hebrews 3:1; Hebrews 4:14). Since a priest cannot have long hair as per Ezekiel 44:20, we can be assured that our Master and King Yehoshua did not have long hair.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion a person must discern themselves what hair length is appropriate to them. Keep in mind that a day will come when we will stand in front of the King of Kings Yehoshua HaMashiach. Women, you don’t want to look like a flapper with short hair when you meet your King Yehoshua HaMashiach. Similarly, men, you don’t want to look like a woman with long hair when you meet your King Yehoshua HaMashiach. The only exception for men when they can have long and uncut hair is when you have taken a Nazirite vow. Remember we are the children of Israel and therefore we need to start living like the children of Israel and leave the traditions of this shameful world behind.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. As a man I am having bald hair and it is not possible for me to grow hair. What should I do?
   For some reason you are bald, which Elohim knows, and therefore you cannot do anything about this. You can wear a men’s hat or a cap if you wish to protect your head.

2. I have shaved off the hair on my head due to baldness. In such situations, what should I do?
   You basically can’t do anything because baldness is not your fault. It is happening because of some unknown reason in your body. You can wear a men’s hat or a cap if you wish to protect your head.

3. I prefer to shave the hair of my head as it is more convenient. Is this style acceptable?
   This style is not acceptable by YHWH Elohim. You are telling the creator, “I will decide what is good for me. As hair is a burden to me, I will shave it off.” Hair is given to human beings as our protection. It is not meant to be a burden. Pagans shave off the hair of their head to please their god.

4. Is it necessary to have my hair length as per the palm of my hand (for men)? Can I have shorter hair?
   No, it is not necessary to have your hair length exactly as the palm of your hand. You definitely can have shorter hair (for men). The whole point is to make sure that your hair is well-trimmed.
5. As a woman, I have difficulty growing my hair. Do I need to wear a hair wig or wear a women’s hat or a head covering?

There is no need to wear a hair wig for this. Try to live a modest life. Many women wear a head covering, but again, this is a personal choice. The two photos shown below show some examples of head covering used by Jewish women (they have used a Jewish head scarf; see Figures 6 and 7).

6. As a woman I am having a lot of hair loss and I need to cut and keep my hair short to control my hair loss. In such situations is my short hair acceptable?

Yes, it is definitely acceptable as this is a health condition that you are facing. In such situations it is totally acceptable to cut your hair to avoid further hair loss.

7. As an African/Pacific Islander woman I don’t have long hair at all and I have very short curly hair. What do I do in such situations?

You cannot do anything as this is how YHWH created you. So be of a good cheer as it is perfectly fine.

8. I need to shave off the hair of my head as I am undergoing medical treatment, for instance, chemotherapy. Is this alright?

Yes, this is perfectly fine as you are suffering from a health condition.

9. As a woman can I have hair longer than the length of my arm?

Yes, you definitely can.

10. I am having a medical condition that prevents me from having hair (example: seborrhoeic dermatitis, alopecia areata, scalp infections etc.). What do I do in such situations?

You would have to cut or in some cases shave your hair, as per the medical advice you receive from your medical practitioner. Keep in mind that you are doing this because of your medical condition. You are not doing this because of social norms.

11. As a man or woman, why should I have hair on my head? Why is hair important on my head?

Hair was created by YHWH to be your protection. It was meant to do good. The medical literature shows:

- a) Hair on our head protects us from the harmful effects of the sun’s ultraviolet rays and helps us in not getting cancer on our head.
- b) Having hair on our head helps us to detect if there are any harmful metals in the human body.
- c) Hair on our head helps our head cool during summer months.
- d) In winter months, hair helps us to prevent a drop in body temperature.
- e) Hair cells are involved in helping us keep our sense of equilibrium.